

STATEMENT FOR THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA

Uganda Hearing

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record. We trust that other witnesses will do a thorough job of analyzing the current situation. As two people who have been working together diligently on peace efforts in northern Uganda, we would like to move directly into solutions, because it is our firm and shared belief that a clear regional strategy backed by the U.S. and other friends of Uganda can produce a timely end to the LRA conflict.

For a tiny fraction of the resources now being spent on the huge humanitarian band-aid being applied in northern Uganda, a new initiative with a real prospect of success should now be undertaken. Such an initiative requires a targeted carrot and stick strategy with an exit option for the LRA leadership if their calculations to leave the battlefield can be sufficiently altered.

THE CARROT: The decisions of LRA commanders to leave the bush and defect are greatly influenced by the post-defection livelihood opportunities that await them. Very recent research reveals that the most important pull-factor in attracting LRA fighters to defect is the possibility of a better life outside the bush, specifically citing better opportunities for education and livelihood. Furthermore, the interviewees particularly mentioned the quality of life and reintegration of LRA fighters who have already returned from the bush as a key factor in calculating return. At present, there is no coordinated scheme to support such reintegration.

While amnesty already exists for all non-indicted LRA and small reintegration packages are provided to ex-combatants, what remains is to develop a more substantial incentive package for the remaining 50 or so top and mid-level non-indicted LRA commanders. Offering a high school education or some support for a small business, combined with housing and a small living allowance, would create a major incentive for these commanders to leave the LRA. It would also create space between the indicted and non-indicted commanders.

THE STICK: As Ugandan Defense Minister Mbabazi outlines in his testimony, the Ugandan government's counter-insurgency campaign has dramatically reduced the size of the LRA in northern Uganda, and its protocol with the government of Sudan has minimized the permanent presence of the LRA in Sudan. However, the LRA has found a new sanctuary in Garamba National Park in eastern DRC, and still receives support from elements of Sudanese military intelligence. Unless a regional military plan is negotiated and implemented, the LRA will be able to reorganize, train and equip just as it did in 1994 when conventional wisdom similarly held that its days were numbered, only to see it strike back with a vengeance. There are two primary options for enhancing military pressure:

Option One: Agreements between the governments in Khartoum, Juba, Kinshasa, and Kampala to allow for joint, coordinated, or cross-border military operations against LRA positions could be brokered with help from the UN or a combination of Core Group countries.

Option Two: The UN Security Council should give a mandate to MONUC and UNMIS to pursue operations specifically against the LRA, and provide those missions with the appropriate additional manpower, intelligence capacity, and logistics. This effort would have to have maximum cooperation from all of the concerned regional governments.

Applying both the carrot and the stick simultaneously would disrupt the LRA's ability to regroup, reduce further the material conditions of its combatants, and provide greater incentives for the non-indicted commanders to defect.

EXIT OPTION: However, as long as the five indicted LRA leaders are still in the bush, a grave threat to the people of the three countries will continue to exist. Therefore, a specific diplomatic initiative aimed at removing them from the battlefield should be part of any expanded strategy. Options here are challenging and may require creative thinking about tradeoffs between justice and peace.

U.S. ROLE: The U.S. role in an expanded strategy is clear. President Museveni needs a partner in the search for peace, and a more focused effort by the U.S. on ending the LRA conflict would provide that partnership. The U.S. has the most leverage to bring to the table, great expertise in these matters, and a new ambassador with a commitment to addressing this issue. The U.S. also has a major investment in helping to consolidate peace in southern Sudan, and is the largest contributor to the largest peacekeeping mission in the world in the DRC. The U.S. should therefore name an envoy to work regionally on all aspects of an enhanced strategy and should help lead the effort to craft the reintegration effort for non-indicted LRA commanders.

CONCLUSION: There are massive development, resettlement, and reconstruction needs in northern Uganda that will have to be addressed to ensure that new wars do not erupt in the future. However, the present threat posed by the LRA is one that could be resolved quickly with additional political will, diplomatic leadership from the UN and Core Group countries, particularly the U.S., and a short term investment in a carrot and stick strategy such as that outlined above.

The opportunity to resolve this tragic conflict has never been better. We urge this Subcommittee to ensure that the U.S. government does all it can to seize this opportunity.

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